

# OMAHA SCHOOLS ARE FULLY PROTECTED

But One Is Unsafe in a Windstorm,  
Declares Building Inspector  
Withnell.

Says He Told the Board Last Fall of  
Condition — Fire Escapes  
Needed.

Building Inspector Withnell, in speaking of the catastrophe at a Cleveland, O., suburb, in which 170 public school children were burned to death, says that the Omaha public school buildings, with possibly one exception, are in good condition and in little danger. This exception, Mr. Withnell says, is the Omaha View school, which was condemned last fall as being unsafe, but it had been decided to finish out this year's school term before taking any decisive steps toward its demolition.

"This school," says Mr. Withnell, "is situated on the top of a hill, and its walls are cracked in several places, and on this account it was condemned and recommendations made that it be torn down. The danger to this building is not so much from fire or explosion."

Mr. Withnell is not in favor of the present system of fire escapes. Their construction is such that in case of fire the pupils from each room are compelled to go into the hallway and from there to the exits at each end of the hall.

"Fire escapes should be constructed," said he, "so that each room would have one separate exit so as to avoid the confusion which always results when a large number of children are thrown together. This could be accomplished by rearranging the fire escapes to lead from the cloak rooms instead of going into the hallways. This arrangement would permit the closing of all the doors in the building and prevent the smoke from entering the rooms and the pupils of each room could make their exit down the fire escape without coming in contact with the entire body of children which invariably results in the trampling down and crushing of the weaker ones."

## President Cole Talks.

David Cole, president of the school board, when asked about the condition of the Omaha View school building, said:

"I have no recollection of this building ever being condemned by the building inspector. Mr. Withnell told the members of the board that the building was unsafe but he did not condemn it. The fact that the building was inadequate for use as a school building was discussed by the board on several occasions, but its condition last fall was not such that would warrant its being closed.

"The board now has under consideration the erection of a new and larger building to take the place of the Omaha View school. The new building will be located within four or five blocks of the old one and will take a great many of the pupils from the Druid Hill and Lotthrop schools and relieve the congestion existing there now. Just as soon as the present school term is ended, work will begin. The location for the new building has not been definitely settled, but it will be near the old one and will be finished in time for the next term of school and the old building will not be used again."

Mr. Cole, while admitting that the building was in some danger from destruction by a terrific wind, thought that its condition was not dangerous at the present time.

"If the building was actually condemned last year," said Mr. Cole, "it certainly would not be in use now."

## Talk of Safeguards.

Superintendent Davidson's office has asked each principal to answer at once whether her building has any doors outside class or cloak room, that do not open outward.

David Cole, president of the Omaha board of education, says that his belief is that all of the modern buildings have doors opening out. Principals have a fire drill each month and inspect the basements twice each day.

At Superintendent Davidson's office, carpenters report their belief that every building has doors opening out. Many cloak rooms have swinging doors. Some at least one of the principals not only keep all doors unlocked, but all windows also, during the day. There are only three buildings above two stories, the old High school, Farnam and Park schools. These have fire escapes.

Superintendent of Construction Finlayson thinks the school buildings of Omaha are in as good condition and as safe from fires or explosions as any similar buildings in the country. The High school and the Park school are heated by plants built in the yards and entirely separated from the buildings proper by nearly 100 feet. The other school buildings are heated by steam or furnace as a rule and he believes the boilers are so fireproof and the furnaces so carefully run that the minimum of danger is assured.